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## **Methods of Teaching German in Oklahoma.**

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Standardization of work is one of the outstanding needs of modern language teachers in this country. The report of the Committee of Twelve of the Modern Language Teachers' Association of America, which was submitted at a meeting of the Association held in December 1898, was a noteworthy step to secure more uniformity of method in language instruction, and many teachers have derived profit from the investigations and suggestions of the Committee. The question of methods, however, still exists and has doubtless always been more or less of a question from the earliest days of language instruction. In the middle ages Latin was the only foreign language taught in the schools of Europe. After the fall of Constantinople (1453) the Greeks fled toward the West and brot their literature with them. In those days of language study, beginners acquired a speaking knowledge and a literary appreciation of the foreign language from Cicero's or Plato's works in the original and grammar was a secondary matter. It was not till later that the formal side of grammar was developed to such an extent as to make Cicero or Plato a loathsome subject to the younger generation. Even in the seventeenth century, however, we find certain reformers objecting to the strictly grammatical method of language instruction, notably Comenius, whose views are summed up in the words: "Every language must be learned by practice rather than by rules; especially by hearing, reading, repeating, copying and by written and oral attempts at imitation." Comenius was also a forerunner of the psychological method invented by Gouin and which rests on the principal of mental visualization. When modern languages were introduced into the curricula of the schools it was quite natural that they should be studied in the same manner as Latin and Greek. Consequently there arose a multitude of texts with rules innumerable, sentences illustrating all rules and exceptions, and groups of sentences with no coherence of thot and no interest appeal to the student, which he was to translate into the foreign tongue or vice versa. Modern reformers, however, have arisen and offer suggestions for a betterment of such conditions. The psychological principle of interest has been appealed to. The natural (direct or conversational), psychological and phonetic methods use the spoken language as a basis. The natural method awakens enthusiasm, holds the attention of the pupil and reserves the study of grammar till rather late in the course.

The psychological method calls for more imagination of the pupil and less pantomime on the part of the teacher than the natural method. The pupil learns words in series or groups that deal with related subjects. The phonetic method, with Dr. Viator as its exponent, trains the ear and vocal organs and makes much use of objects in the class-room instruction. The reading method, in its strictest sense, emphasizes translation and sight reading while pronunciation and oral exercises receive slight attention. Most schools in this country do not adhere to any one of these five methods (grammatical, natural, psychological, phonetic and reading) but appropriate certain points from one or the other. The following list of questions was sent to all the colleges and to the leading high schools of the state in order to ascertain definitely how German was taught in the educational institutions of Oklahoma and to see if there was any present standard of method in existence among the teachers of the state.

- (1) How are sounds taught to a beginners' class?
- (2) Does the teacher use any phonetic helps?
- (3) How soon in a beginners' course is the textbook introduced?
- (4) What is the language of the classroom?
- (5) If both German and English are used, when and why is the change made?
- (6) To what extent is translation from the German into English resorted to?
- (7) Does the time given to translation into English vary in the work of the various classes?
- (8a) What is, in your opinion, the relative importance of written and oral composition? (b) Are the texts that are read discussed in German? (c) Are resumé's given in German?
- (9) Is the German script required?
- (10a) Have your pupils ever given a German play? (b) Have you a German club?

While the answers were varied, there was much common ground covered by all and certain ideals toward which the majority were striving. In regard to the manner of teaching sounds and the use of phonetics there were advocates of various systems from Pestalozzi's "Syllabaries" to Viator's chart. One third used phonetic helps in teaching sounds; many used word drills; but two thirds of the whole number (including many who used phonetic helps) came to the conclusion that the best way to teach a beginners' class sounds was chiefly thru imitation of the teacher. In this connection it is interesting to compare a statement in S. C. Parker's "Methods of Teaching in High Schools":—"Miss Lydia Schmidt of the University of Chicago High School studied one year in Berlin under one

of the best teachers of phonetics. She concluded that a simple introduction based largely on imitation of the teacher was quite sufficient. She wrote to her former instructor in Berlin and found that he had concluded that all of the necessary instruction could be given in a much simpler form and in ten practical lessons." The majority of the Oklahoma teachers using phonetic helps, stated that only the simpler ones were used. A few drew diagrams of the vocal organs to illustrate how sounds were made. Some teachers found phonetic training especially valuable for students who were tone deaf.

In regard to the time of introducing the textbook, two-thirds of the answers were to the effect that it should not be introduced before the second week, while several preferred it later. The general opinion was that there should be drill on sounds, especially on those that are not in the English language; then the pronunciation of simpler words, that the teacher might use in conversation or write on the board; and finally the use of simple sentences before the textbook be taken up. This tendency shows a breaking away from the traditional grammar method of the text from the first day.

About one half of the answers showed that German was the predominating language of the classroom from the first, English being used chiefly for grammatical explanations and idioms in beginning classes. Several answers stated that English and German were used in the first year, chiefly German in the second year, and no English in the advanced classes. The habit of learning German synonyms early in the course was one of the means of eliminating English. The fact that English saves time seemed to be a common reason for its use and yet the majority of those who used it extensively to economize time did not emphasize the German from the start.

With very few exceptions translation from the German into English was used chiefly to explain particularly difficult passages and idiomatic constructions. Some doubted the advisability of treating "Wilhelm Tell" in this manner as it was, in their opinion, not adapted for conversation. Quite a number insisted on much translation in the second year, altho as stated in the answer to the fourth question an equally large number used very little English thruout the course. Naturally all technical and scientific texts required translation.

Those that thot oral composition was the more important were equal in number to those who attached equal importance to the written and oral composition. Only one answer gave written composition more importance than oral. Oral work was naturally esteemed valuable for conversation while written work was recognized for developing accuracy. "Oral composition trains the mind and written composition visualizes the mental

comprehension." "Written composition is valuable for accuracy; oral for readiness." The majority discussed the texts in German and gave resumsés in German.

Almost one half of the institutions taught the German script, but the most of these did not require it. One fourth had given a German play and one third had a German club.

An instance of the direct method is found in the high school at Enid. There are two hundred enrolled in the German department there, five first year classes, three second year and one third year. This school has fortunately solved the time problem for beginners that the most of us German teachers have always felt; the beginning classes meet for ninety minutes each day instead of forty-five. All work is first introduced thru conversation and oral composition, then later each makes a notebook under the teacher's direction, using the words, expressions and grammatical constructions learned. The grammar as a text is used as a review or summary only about the last week or two of each quarter. A German reader is used, many stories are written in original form by the students from pictures, and a great deal of simple memory work is required. German games are played about once a week. The pupils all show interest in their work since they feel that in learning a language by the direct method they have something of practical value and worth. The Enid High School is especially interesting since it affords an example of both the grammatical and natural or direct methods, for the latter has been introduced this year and comparisons can be drawn between the classes. The head of the German department states that the pupils in the direct method classes are much stronger than those in the grammar method classes, that they take more interest and pride in their work since they derive more tangible results from their efforts.

May the time come when all teachers of German will be required to have a speaking as well as a grammatical and reading knowledge of the language. This questionnaire has at least revealed the fact that many teachers realize the importance of the spoken language, but as long as there is not perfect cooperation in this respect we still have a problem. How many teachers who have labored diligently to develop "Sprachgefühl" have had their fond hopes crushed in the middle of a year, perhaps, by the arrival of some newcomers to whom the sound of the German language was as unfamiliar as Sanskrit? These pupils may be able to decline and conjugate with ease but they nevertheless hold the class back if they remain. When the work is standardized as to method all teachers and schools will cooperate in teaching German as a live and virile language.